

Baghdad Jewish Arabic

Baghdad Jewish Arabic (Arabic: *عربية يهودية بغدادية* , עִרְבִּיָּה יְהוּדִית , בִּגְדָדִית) or autonym **haki mal yihud** (Jewish Speech) or **el-haki malna** (our speech)^[1] is the Arabic dialect spoken by the Jews of Baghdad and other towns of Southern Iraq. This dialect differs from the dialect spoken by the Jews in Northern Iraq, such as Mosul and 'Ana. The Baghdadi and Northern dialects may be regarded as subvarieties of Judeo-Iraqi Arabic. As with most Judeo-Arab communities, there are likely to be few, if any, speakers of the Judeo-Iraqi Arabic dialects who still reside within Iraq. Rather these dialects have been maintained or are facing critical endangerment within respective Judeo-Iraqi diasporas, namely those of Israel and the United States. In 2014, the film *Farewell Baghdad* (Arabic: *مطير الحمام*; Hebrew: מִפְרִיחַ הַיוֹנִים, lit. "The Dove Flyer"), which is performed mostly in Jewish Baghdadi Arabic dialect, became the first film to be almost completely performed in Judeo-Iraqi Arabic.

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Baghdad Jewish Arabic	
 Jewish Baghdadi Arabic	
Native to	Israel, Iraq
Language family	Afro-Asiatic - Semitic - Central Semitic - Arabic - Mesopotamian Arabic - North Mesopotamian Arabic - Judeo-Arabic - Judeo-Iraqi Arabic Baghdad Jewish Arabic
Writing system	Arabic alphabet Hebrew alphabet
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	–
Glottolog	<i>None</i>

Classification

Baghdad Jewish Arabic (and Baghdadi Christian Arabic) resemble the dialect of Northern Iraq, and more distantly that of Syria, rather than the Baghdad Arabic spoken by the Muslims. The Muslim dialect is classified as a *gilit* dialect (from their pronunciation of the Arabic word for "I said") while the others are *qeltu* dialects. Another resemblance between Baghdad Jewish Arabic and North Mesopotamian Arabic is the pronunciation of *ra* as a uvular. This peculiarity goes back centuries: in medieval Iraqi Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts the letters *ra* and *ghayn* are frequently interchanged.^[2] It is thought that the *qeltu* dialects represent the older Arabic dialect

of Mesopotamia while the *gilit* dialect is of Bedouin origin. Another factor may be the northern origins of the Jewish community of Baghdad after 1258 (see below under History). Like Northern Mesopotamian and Syrian Arabic, Jewish Baghdadi Arabic shows some signs of an Aramaic substrate. Violette Shamosh^[3] records that, at the Passover Seder, she could understand some of the passages in Aramaic but none of the passages in Hebrew.

History

The Mongol invasion wiped out most of the inhabitants of Mesopotamia. Later, the original qeltu Baghdadi dialect became extinct as a result of massive Bedouin immigrations to Lower Mesopotamia and was replaced by the Bedouin influenced *gilit* dialect. The Jews of Baghdad are a largely indigenous population and they also preserve the pre-Mongol invasion dialect of Baghdad in its Jewish form, which is similar but a bit different from the general pre-Mongol Baghdadi dialect due to the linguistic influences of Hebrew and Judeo-Babylonian Aramaic, instead of the general Babylonian Aramaic that existed before the Islamic invasion.

As with other respective religious and ethnic communities coexisting in Baghdad, the Jewish community had almost exclusively spoken as well as written in their distinctive dialect, largely drawing their linguistic influences from Hebrew and Judeo-Aramaic and even non-linguistic influences from languages such as Sumerian, Akkadian, Persian and Turkish. Simultaneous fluency and literacy in the Arabic used by the dominant Muslim communities had also been commonplace.

With waves of persecution and thus emigration, the dialect has been carried to and until recently used within respective Judeo-Iraqi diaspora communities, spanning Bombay, Calcutta, Singapore, Hong Kong, Manchester and numerous other international urban hubs. After the mass emigration of Jews from Iraq to Israel between the 1940s and 1960s, Israel came to hold the single largest linguistic community of Judeo-Iraqi Arabic speakers. With successive generations being born and raised in Israel, it is mainly the older people who still actively or passively speak Judeo-Baghdadi and other forms of Judeo-Iraqi Arabic. Israelis of Iraqi descent in turn are largely unilingual Israeli Hebrew speakers.

Orthography

The Jews of Baghdad also have a written Judeo-Arabic that differs from the spoken language and uses Hebrew characters.^[4] There is a sizeable published religious literature in the language, including several Bible translations and the *Qanūn an-nisā'* (قانون النساء) of the hakham Yosef Hayyim.

The following method of describing the letters of the Hebrew alphabet was used by teachers in Baghdad until quite recently:^[5]

Letter	Description	
𐤀	'ábu 'ágba ' gūs	'alēf
	It has four heads	
𐤁	ġazūna	bē
	It's a niche	
𐤂	'ábu jənh	gimāl
	Has a wing	
𐤃	nájaġ	dāl
	It's a hatchet	
𐤄	ġójla məqṭū ' a	hē
	It has a severed leg	
𐤅	'əbġi	wāw
	It's a needle	
𐤆	dəmbūs	zān
	A pin	
𐤇	'əmm ġəjeltēn šāġ	ḥēt
	Both its legs are intact	
𐤈	ġójla b-báṭna	ṭēt
	Its leg is in its stomach	
𐤉	'əxtak lə-zġayyġi	yōd
	Your younger sister	
𐤊	ġazūna mdáwwġa	kāf
	A round niche	
𐤋	l-jámal	lamād
	A camel	
𐤌	ġāsa zbibāyi	mīm
	Its head is a raisin	
𐤍	čəngāl	nūn
	It's a hook	
𐤎	mdáwwaġ	səmmāx
	It's circular	
𐤏	'ábu ġasēn	' ān
	It has two heads	
𐤐	b-ṭəmma zbibāyi	pē
	Has a raisin in its mouth	
𐤑	ġasēn w-məḥni	šād
	Has two heads and is bent	
	ġójlu ṭwīli	qōf

𐤀	Has a long leg	
𐤁	məčrux	rōš
	It's curved	
𐤂	'ābu tláṭ-ḡūs	šin
	It has three heads	
𐤃	ḡójla mə ' ḡūja	tā
	Has a crooked leg	
𐤄	sálām	'alēf-lamād
	Bye bye	

Phonology

Consonants

Jewish Baghdadi consonants^[6]

		Labial		Dental		Palato-dental	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
		plain	velarized	plain	velarized						
Nasal		m	(mˤ)	n	(nˤ)						
Plosive	voiceless	p		t	tˤ			k	q		ʔ
	voiced	b	(bˤ)	d				g			
Affricate	voiceless					tʃ					
	voiced					dʒ					
Fricative	voiceless	f		θ				x		ħ	h
	voiced	(v)		ð	ðˤ			ɣ		ʕ	
Approximant		w					j				
Lateral				l	(lˤ)						
Trill				r							

JB is relatively conservative in preserving Classical Arabic phonemes. Classical Arabic /q/ has remained as an uvular (or post-velar) stop,^[a] like Christian Baghdad Arabic, but unlike in Muslim Baghdad Arabic where it is pronounced as [g]. /k/ is retained as [k], like in Christian Baghdadi, but unlike the Muslim dialect where it is sometimes [tʃ]. Classical Arabic interdental /ð, θ, ðˤ/ are preserved, like in Muslim Baghdadi Arabic (Christian Baghdadi Arabic merges them into /d, t, dˤ/). /dˤ/ has merged into /ðˤ/.^[7]

There are a few rare minimal pairs with /lˤ, bˤ/ (e.g. *wáḷḷa* 'by God! (an oath)' vs. *wálla* 'he went away', *bāḷa* 'father, dad' vs. *bāba* 'her door'). In other words, there are velarized segments which cannot be demonstrated to be phonemic, but which cannot be substituted, e.g. *ṁāṁa* 'mother, mummy'.^[8] There is a certain degree of velarization harmony.

/r/ is one of the primary distinguishing features of Jewish (as opposed to Muslim, but not Christian) Baghdadi Arabic. Older Arabic /r/ has shifted to /ɣ/ (as in Christian, but not Muslim, Baghdadi Arabic). However /r/ has been re-introduced in non-Arabic loans (e.g. *brāxa* 'blessing' < Heb. ברכה, *qūri* 'teapot' < Pers. qūrī). Modern

loan words from other Arabic dialects also have this sound; this sometimes leads to cases where the same word may have two forms depending on context, e.g. *ʿáskaj* 'army' vs. *ḥākəṃ* *ʿáskari* 'martial law'. There are many instances where this alternation leads to a subtle change in meaning, e.g. *fağğ* 'he poured, served foot' vs. *farr* 'he threw'.^[9]

The consonants /p, g, tʃ/ were originally of foreign origin, but have pervaded the language to the extent that native speakers do not perceive or even realize their non-native origin.^[10]

Vowels

Jewish Baghdadi vowels^[11]

Front		Back
iː i		u uː
	ə	
eː e		o oː
	a aː	

Suprasegmentals

Stress is usually on the ultimate or penultimate syllable, but sometimes on the antipenultimate (mostly in loans or compound words).^[12]

Grammar

Verbs

Perfect inflectional suffixes^[13]

		Unstressed	Stressed
s.	1	-tu	-tō (tū/u) ¹
	2	m -t	-t
		f -ti	-tē (tī/i) ¹
	3	m -	-
		f -əṭ	-əṭ
pl.	1	-na	-nā
	2	-təṃ	-təṃ
	3	-u	-ō (ū/u) ¹

Paradigm of kátab 'to write' in perfect alone and with a 3ms indirect object^[14]

s.	1	ktábtu	ktəbtōlu
	2	m ktabt	ktábtlu
		f ktábtī	ktəbtēlu
	3	m kátab	ktáblu
		f kátbət	kətbə́tlu
pl.	1	ktábna	ktəbnālu
	2	ktábtəṃ	ktəbtémlu
	3	kátbu	kətbōlu

1. before 3f.s. direct pronominal suffix

Imperfect inflectional affixes^[15]

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Paradigm of kátab 'to write' in imperfect^[16]

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s.	1	'a-
	2	m tə-
		f t- ... ĕn
	3	m yə ⁻¹
		f tə-
	1	nə-
pl.	2	t- ... ōn
	3	y- ... ōn ¹

s.	1	'áktəb
	2	m t́əktəb
		f tkətbēn ²
	3	m ýəktəb
		f t́əktəb
	1	ńəktəb
pl.	2	tkətbōn ²
	3	ykətbōn ²

1. may be actualized as *i* before another consonant, e.g. yqūl > iqūl 'he'll say'
2. *n* is elided when a direct or indirect object pronoun suffix is present, e.g. *tkətbēla* 'you (f.s.) will write to her'

when the 3f.s. direct object pronoun suffix is present, ĕ > ī/iy and ō > ū/uw, e.g. *tkətbīha/tkətbīya* 'you (f.s.) will write it (f.s.)'

Direct object pronominal suffixes^[17]

s.	1	ni ¹ , (y)(y)i ²
	2	m ak ³ , k ⁴
		f ək ³ , ki ⁴
	3	m nu ³ , u ⁴
		f ha ⁵ , a ^{3,5}
	1	na
pl.	2	kəm
	3	həm ⁴ , əm ³

Indirect object pronominal suffixes^[18]

s.	1	-li
	2	m -lak
		f -lək
	3	m -lu
		f -la
	1	-lna
pl.	2	-lkəm
	3	-ləm

Double object pronominal suffixes^{[b][19]}

s.	1	-lyā (lyānu)
	2	m -lyāk (lkyā, kəlyā)
		f -lyāki
	3	m -lyānu (lyā)
		f -lyāha
	1	-lnyā
pl.	2	-lyākəm
	3	-lyāhəm

1. after verbal forms (and rarely particles)
2. after nouns and particles
3. after a consonant
4. after a vowel
5. (*ha* and *a* may both occur after some vowels, and in some instances *ha* may become *ya* or *wa*)

See also

- [Judeo-Iraqi Arabic](#)
- [Iraqi Arabic](#)
- [Baghdad Arabic](#)
- [Judeo-Arabic languages](#)
- [Baghdadi Jews](#)
- [History of the Jews in Iraq](#)

Notes

- a. Though in a few phrases it has become [dʒ], e.g. *ʾīd mən wára w-ʾīd mən jəddām* 'one hand behind and one in front' (said when someone returns emptyhanded).
- b. Used to specify the indirect object while leaving the direct object unspecified, e.g. *jabəlyāk* 'he brought it/him/her/them to you (m.s.)'.

References

Citations

1. Ella Shohat (2017) The Invention of Judeo-Arabic, *Interventions*, 19:2, 153-200, doi: 10.1080/1369801X.2016.1218785 (<https://doi.org/10.1080%2F1369801X.2016.1218785>)
2. Avishur, *Studies in Judaeo-Arabic Translations of the Bible*.
3. *Memories of Eden: A Journey through Baghdad*
4. Mansour 1991, p. 15.
5. Mansour 1991, pp. 190-191.
6. Mansour 1991, p. 53.
7. Mansour 1991, pp. 26-28.
8. Mansour 1991, p. 57.
9. Mansour 1991, pp. 29-31.
10. Mansour 1991, p. 33.
11. Mansour 1991, p. 70.
12. Mansour 1991, pp. 87-88.
13. Mansour 1991, p. 127.
14. Mansour 1991, p. 126.
15. Mansour 1991, pp. 128-129.
16. Mansour 1991, p. 128.
17. Mansour 1991, pp. 169-173.
18. Mansour 1991, p. 174.
19. Mansour 1991, pp. 176-178.

Sources

- Blanc, Haim. *Communal Dialects in Baghdad*: Harvard 1964.
- Kees Versteegh, et al. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*: Brill 2006.
- Mansour, Jacob. *The Jewish Baghdadi Dialect: Studies and Texts in the Judaeo-Arabic Dialect of Baghdad*: The Babylonian Jewry Heritage Centre 1991.
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External links

- Jewish Baghdadi recordings (http://semarch.uni-hd.de/sprecher.php4?&ORT_ID=9)
- Baghdadi Jewish Arabic-Hebrew dictionary (<https://iraqijews.info/%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%9F-%D7%A2%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%A7%D7%99-%D7%A2%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99/>) (In Hebrew)

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